Channel Surfing the Simultaneous Canada and US Debates

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Toronto, ON – About two thirds of Canadians plan to be debate-watching on October 2nd, but they will have to choose between the English-language federal Leaders' debate here in Canada or the Vice-Presidential debate south of the border. A new Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of CanWest News Service and Global National finds that three in ten (28%) plan to watch *only* the Canadian Leaders' debate, 4% will watch *only* the U.S. vice-presidential debate, and one in three (32%) indicates that they will flip between both debates.

In total, this leaves six in ten (60%) Canadians watching at least a portion of the Canadian verbal jousting match, and four in ten (36%) who will see portions of the American vice-presidential showdown. One in three (35%) Canadians will not watch either debate, and 1% are still undecided on the matter.

Focusing on the Canadian debates to be held in both official languages, four in ten (39%) think that Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper will perform the best, placing him well above the rest of the pack. Two in ten (21%) believe NDP leader Jack Layton will emerge victorious from the two debates.

Just 9% believe that Liberal leader Stephane Dion will perform the best at the debates; an equal proportion (9%) believes Elizabeth May of the Green Party will have the best performance. Seven percent (7%) of Canadians (24% of Quebecers) think that Gilles Duceppe will showcase the best performance of all the leaders.

Despite the hype leading up to the debate, only 9% of Canadians think that their final vote on October 14th will be influenced 'a lot' by the debate this week, and another 24% suggest that their vote will be 'somewhat' influenced by the debate. Two in ten (21%) think that it might have 'a little bit' of impact on their final vote choice, but 44% claim the debate will 'not at all' be influenced by what happens over the course of the two debates.

These are the findings of an Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of CanWest News Service and Global Television. The poll was conducted from September 23 to September 25, 2008. For the survey, a representative randomly selected sample of 1,000 adult Canadians was interviewed by telephone. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within ±3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire adult population of Canada been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population. These data were weighted to ensure that the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual Canadian population according to Census data.

Who's Watching the Debates?

By aggregating those who are planning on watching the Canadian debate exclusively with those who will be flipping between the American and Canadian debates, the data reveal that 60% of Canadians intend to watch the English-language debate, at least in part.

- Ontarians are the most likely to say that they'll watch at least some of the Canadian debate (66%), followed by those in Saskatchewan and Manitoba (64%), British

Columbia (60%), Atlantic Canada (56%), and Alberta (56%). Interestingly, even a majority (54%) of Quebecers say they'll watch at least some of the English-language debate.

- Quebecers (43%) are most likely to say they're not going to watch either the English-language debate or the vice-presidential debate, while those living in Alberta (39%), Atlantic Canada (39%), British Columbia (35%), Saskatchewan and Manitoba (32%) and Ontario (29%) are less likely to say that they won't watch either debate.

- Younger Canadians, aged 18 to 34, are more likely (43%) than middle-aged (37%), aged 35 to 54, or older Canadians (27%), aged 55+, to say that they won't be watching either debate.

Who Do Canadians Think Will Perform the Best in the Leaders' Debates?

- **Stephen Harper -- 39% total** – A higher proportion of individuals in Alberta (52%) and Saskatchewan and Manitoba (52%) think that Harper will perform the best in the debates than the proportion who live in Ontario (43%), British Columbia (39%), Quebec (29%) and Atlantic Canada (21%).

- **Jack Layton – 21% total –** Atlantic Canadians (27%) are the most likely to believe that Layton will perform the best, followed by those in British Columbia (25%), Ontario (23%), Quebec (19%), Saskatchewan and Manitoba (18%) and finally Alberta (11%).

- **Stephane Dion – 9% total** – Atlantic Canadians (17%) are most likely to think that Dion will perform the best, followed by those living in Ontario (10%), Quebec (9%), British Columbia (9%), Alberta (5%) and Saskatchewan and Manitoba (2%).

- **Elizabeth May -- 9% total –** Atlantic Canadians (17%) are the most likely to believe that May will be superior in the debates, followed by residents of British Columbia (12%), Ontario (11%), Saskatchewan and Manitoba (10%), Alberta (9%) and finally Quebec (3%)

- **Gilles Duceppe – 7% total** - One quarter (24%) of Quebecers believe that Duceppe will have the best performance in the debate. Not surprisingly, this drops down to 1% across the rest of Canada.

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